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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is hereby circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[2 February 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Human Rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

All basic civil liberties and freedom rights as the freedom of religion, expression, assembly and association massively are restricted in North Korea. Systematically the freedom of movement has been denied to its citizens. Even the possession of a mobile phone with access to the Chinese telecommunications system strongly is prohibited and will be punished by harsh prison sentences. Furthermore Chinese cellphone services regularly are jammed to prevent any contacts will relatives or friends in abroad. The country remains one of the most brutal and repressive states in the world, where even communication with relatives becomes a crime.

Despite the desperate human rights record North Korean authorities not are committed to cooperate with the UN human rights system or its institutions. We are very much concerned about the lack of commitment of North Korean authorities to sign and respect international human rights conventions. Unfortunately the Government of North Korea seems to have no political will to accept and implement recommendations of UN human rights institutions. The UN Security Council several times has discussed the egregious human rights situation and has called to develop a strategy in order to end impunity for crimes against humanity in North Korea.

North Korea has strengthened the control of its frontiers to prevent citizens from leaving the country without permission. CCTV cameras are supervising the barbed wire fences to neighboring China and the number of border guards has increased. Due to the enhanced control the number of defections to South Korea recorded in the year 2017 was 1.127. The figure is 20 percent down from the year 2016, when 1.418 defections were registered by South Korean authorities. The majority of defectors are women. Most of these refugees finally are settling down in South Korea. Women constantly are threatened by gender-based violence, discrimination and sexual exploitation.

Especially in detention by security forces women are experiencing sexual abuses, rape or torture.
We are deeply concerned about the fate of North Korean defectors searching for protection in neighboring People's Republic of China. In the year 2017 Chinas has increased the arrest and repatriation of North Koreans trying to escape massive human rights violations and poverty at home. In November 2017 a group of 10 defectors has been deported by China to North Korea. They had been arrested as they attempted to leave North Korea a month before. During July and August 2017 alone, some 41 North Koreans were arrested in China in comparison to 51 arrests in the whole year of 2016. Furthermore several local guides and supporters of the defectors have been imprisoned in China. The arrested North Korean citizens routinely are deported to North Korea because they are designated by Chinese authorities as illegal "economic migrants". Many of those deported refugees are facing detention and prison camps back home.

As a state party to the UN Refugee Convention and its accompanying 1967 Protocol, China has the obligation not to return defectors to North Korea because they are facing persecution, torture and inhumane treatment after deportation.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the UN Human Rights Council:

- to address and condemn the massive massive human rights violations and crimes against humanity in North Korea,
- to urge all UN member states to focus on human rights in their bilateral relations with North Korea,
- to raise more awareness internationally on the desperate human rights record in North Korea,
- to urge all states to ensure protection for North Korean defectors and their supporters.